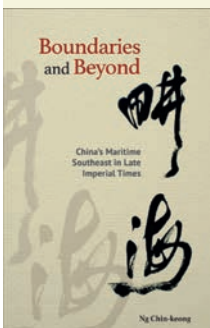


Late Imperial China's maritime boundaries and beyond

Most of us should be familiar with Professor Ng Chin-keong's seminal study, *Trade and Society: The Amoy Network on the China Coast, 1683-1735*, which was first published in 1983. But perhaps we are less familiar with his many other important studies on China's maritime history – mostly articles and chapters in books in English and Chinese – published over the past forty years. Many of these shorter studies are scattered about in hard to find, obscure journals. Ng Chin-keong's new book under review here is a collection of fourteen essays published between 1970 and 2015. The book is divided into four parts loosely arranged around the concepts of physical, political, and cultural boundaries and crossing boundaries as applied to maritime China during the fourteenth through nineteenth centuries. As the author explains in his Preface, the 'boundaries and beyond' used in the book's title "highlights the two contesting forces of continuities and discontinuities that characterized China's maritime southeast in late imperial times" (p. ix). Although boundaries were meant to maintain stability, status quo, and sociopolitical order – to demarcate stability and instability – nonetheless because they were always in a state of flux rulers, statesmen, merchants, and ordinary seafarers had to constantly make adjustments according to particular circumstances.

Reviewer: Robert J. Antony



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Boundaries and Beyond: China's Maritime Southeast in Late Imperial Times
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Read review online at:
<http://newbooks.asia/review/boundaries-beyond>

AS WITH HIS OTHER STUDIES the essays included in this book concern mostly the economic, political, diplomatic, and social relationships between southern China, especially Fujian province, and Southeast Asia. Avoiding the more typical Eurocentric and Sinocentric approaches to the study of maritime history, Ng instead takes a broad perspective for understanding the interactions and connections between China, her southern neighbors, and Europeans across the wide South China Sea. His first chapter (part 1) provides a concise overview of the long history of maritime southeastern Asia, covering some two thousand years from ancient times to the fifteenth century, a period that was characterized by flexibility and inclusiveness in conducting long-distance trade. The other chapters delineate perceived boundaries between Chinese and the "other" (part 2), undercurrents of social and economic forces that challenged official demarcations (part 3), and transnational movements of people, goods, and ideas across boundaries (part 4). The author views maritime history in terms of a continuous struggle between tradition and innovation through the interactions, compromises, and accommodations of governments and people. In the process old boundaries disappeared only to be replaced by new ones.

In one way or another most of the chapters deal with maritime trade, the interactions between merchants and

officials, and relations between Chinese and foreigners, whose perspectives and objectives were seldom the same. Challenging long held views, Ng shows that Chinese officials tended to be pragmatic and flexible in their dealings with Portuguese traders (chapters 3, 8 & 9) and British officials (chapters 4, 5, 11, 13 & 14). The late imperial state, too, was not universally opposed to merchants and their overseas economic activities; in fact, many officials realized that the substantial revenues from customs fees provided both economic benefits and social stability in seaboard provinces (chapters 2, 9 and 13). For their part, Ng argues that the merchants also willingly made compromises that allowed them to be more acceptable to Confucian elites. In what the author calls the "Confucianization of merchant culture", individual merchants and trade guilds tried to accommodate mercantile and Confucian values by playing down profit-seeking and by using their wealth and organizational capabilities for responsive public welfare (chapter 10). Ng is at his best in his case study (chapter 13) of a successful Fujian merchant in Batavia, Chen Yilao, who was arrested after he returned to his homeland in 1749 and was subsequently sent into life exile. Ng astutely argues the complex and extenuating circumstances in this case and the reasons for Chen's harsh treatment. The author convincingly challenges previous scholarship that has viewed this case as a prime example of Qing anti-maritime attitudes and policies by showing that, in fact, Chen Yilao was not punished because of any underlying governmental hostility towards trade but rather because he had violated the laws concerning crossing borders, remaining abroad for too long, and employment by a foreign government. From the government's perspective the main issue was national security. Taken as a whole, Ng's main conclusion is that despite the strict governmental prohibitions and often ambiguous policies, the late imperial age was a time of vibrant maritime activities and wholesome transnational exchanges that were chiefly the results of "the dynamic spirit of the maritime population" (p. 442).

In any book of this sort – one that is a collection of previously published essays by the same author – there are

bound to be some problems. One problem is overlap between different chapters where some of the same materials are repeated again and again. Another problem, of course, is the lack of updating of essays published in the 1970s (chapters 7, 8 & 9). Although these are still useful chapters on the socio-economic conditions in rural Fujian that provide the context for understanding overseas commercial expansion in the Ming and Qing periods, nonetheless they could have benefitted by the inclusion and updating of recent studies by Paul Van Dyke on Canton merchants or by Philip Kuhn on overseas Chinese.

But those are minor quibbles. Ng Chin-keong and NUS Press are to be commended for making available this fine and useful collection of essays by one of the doyens of Asian maritime history. This book should be essential reading for anyone interested in the history of East Asian maritime commerce, international relations, and transnational migrations, and required reading in graduate courses dealing with those subjects.

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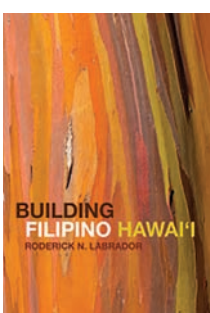
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Building Filipino Hawai'i

Roderick Labrador's *Building Filipino Hawai'i* provides a rich, nuanced account of Filipino identities in a distinctively multicultural American context. The study confronts the tremendous diversity of Filipinos in Hawai'i, who vary in terms of the timing of migration, region, language, and social class. It is in this milieu that Labrador's highly personal account unfolds, documenting efforts to develop a more united Filipino identity in the Hawaiian context.

Reviewers: Shane J. Barter and Rayen Rooney



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Building Filipino Hawai'i.
Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press,
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Read review online at:
<http://newbooks.asia/review/building-filipino>

LABRADOR PROVIDES A RICH ACCOUNT of diversity among Filipinos in 'Oahu, charting their origins and continued experiences. With Asian migrants excluded from American territories at the turn of the century, the Philippines, located within the American empire, provided cheap labour on Hawaiian sugar plantations. *Sakada* plantation labourers brought to Hawai'i a century ago were primarily Ilocano and most were uneducated. After World War II, more educated Tagalog-speaking migrants began arriving with a new sense of Filipino identity. Today, Filipino migrants continue to arrive in Hawai'i for jobs ranging from nurses and maids to business-

persons and academics. Labrador outlines three primary groups of Filipinos in Hawai'i: Local (born in Hawai'i, mostly descended from sakada migrants), immigrants from the Philippines, and migrants from the continental United States. Labrador succeeds in painting a picture of Filipino diversity, noting how persons of Filipino descent manage and shift their identities over time, evolving different understandings of what it means to be Filipino.

Labrador's study locates Filipinos within Hawai'i rich ethnic tapestry. Filipinos have not seen the upward mobility enjoyed by Chinese, Korean, or Japanese communities. Labrador describes